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The Truth of the Christian REVELATION,
prov'd from the Nature and Greatness of
its MIRACLES; and of the Usefulness
and Necessity of CREEDS in General, in Op-
position to Deists and Free-Thinkers.

IN TWO 693. d 3
SERMONS,

Preach'd before the Honourable

Mr. Baron PRICE,

AND

Mr. Justice BLENCOE,

AT THE

A S S I Z E S

Held at GLOUCESTER.

By BENJAMIN BAYLY, M. A.
Rector of St. James's in Bristol.

Publish'd at the Request of the HIGH-
SHERIFF and GRAND-JURY.

L O N D O N:

Printed for John Wyatt, at the Rose in St. Paul's
Church-Yard. 1713.

THE
HONORABLE
THE LORDS OF THE
HONORABLE

IN TWO
SERMONS

THE
AND

MR. JOHN B. F. WOOD
AT THE

A S S E S S E S
HONORABLE

BY BISHOP JOHN B. F. WOOD
RECTOR OF THE CHURCH OF THE
ST. JOHN AND ST. JOHN

AND
CHURCH OF THE

T O

Lawford Cole, Esq;

H I G H - S H E R I F

O F T H E

County of Gloucester,

A N D T H E

Gentlemen of the *Grand- JURY.*

GENTLEMEN,

I Take it as a great Honour, that you were pleased to think so well of my late Sermon, as to cause me to Publish it, which Good and Understanding Readers will not impute to any Excellency that is in it, but to the Zeal that animates you for the Chri-

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stian Faith, which they will observe, makes you overlook many Imperfections, and recommends every thing to your especial Approbation, that appears honestly and sincerely intended in its Defence. You could bear with Men, who differ from you in Matters of Religion, (although out of regard to your own Church and the Publick Good, not without Grief :) But when it comes to this pass that Men cannot be contented with any singularity of Opinion, but set up to persuade the whole Nation, that they ought to be of no Religion at all, this you thought worthy of your highest Resentment and Zeal; and who can blame you for it?

I happen'd to say something of this in my poor way; but when I heard the Charge from the Bench to the same purpose, so full of clear, powerful and charming Eloquence, (so predisposed as you were in your selves, by good Prin-

Principles) I must confess, I do not, I cannot wonder, that you were greatly moved and kindled at it ; and that you could not depart without leaving behind you, a publick Censure and Brand on such Impious Books, as a Testimony to your whole County, of your Abhorrence and Detestation of them. My good Luck to fall in with the Honourable the Judges and your own Sentiments in this Particular, I am sensible, is what render'd my Discourse so acceptable to you.

Seeing you so much in Earnest (in a Cause that highly becomes you, and all Christians) I have exceeded your Request, and presumed to present you with what I had the Honour to deliver to many of you, the Affizes before: The Argument is the same, and I hope, as full to your Purpose, and that induced me to believe, that it might not be unacceptable to you ; however, you will

will hazard no Reputation about this, it being an Act of my own, and you are left at your Liberty to own and Patronize it, or not, as it shall approve itself to you.

I am sure, as many of you are possessed of very plentiful Estates, so are you not destitute of other Internal, and more valuable Endowments; such as good Parts, fine Breeding, a Zeal for Christianity, the Establish'd Church, and the Interest of the Nation: And as you are the Ornament and Example of your County in these Respects; so I doubt not, (had I the Happiness to live near you) but I might be able, with the same Truth and Security, to Remark in you, other Vertues, which give the greatest Lustre to the former, and are the most shining Accomplishments in a Gentleman's Character. Infinite Pity is it, and of great Detriment to the World, that ever
 excellent

excellent Parts, and the most polite Behaviour, should stand separated from true and sincere Piety, which so set off and recommend one another, and the Possessor of them, when acting in concert together. If these Discourses should in the least measure promote this latter in your selves or others, it would be no bad Return (and it is the best that I can make) for those many great Civilities that You have been pleased to confer upon

Your most Humble

and Obligated Servant,

Benj. Bayly.

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BOOKS Printed for JOHN WYAT,
the Rose in St. Paul's Church-Yard:

AN *Essay on Inspiration*, in two Parts: The first shewing what Proofs are necessary for a Prophet's own Conviction, by which he may certainly know himself to be Inspired: The second shewing what Proofs are necessary for him to Produce in order to satisfy and convince the World of the reality of his Inspiration. The Second Edition, *Octavo.*

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JOHN xv. 24.

If I had not done among them, the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin ; but now have they both seen and hated, both me and my Father.

THE Subject that these Words lead me to consider and treat of, may seem unsuitable to the Occasion, unless it occurs to Mens Minds (which is very Natural and Obvious) how great a support Christianity is of all Laws, whether Natural or Instituted ; the former of which, it hath received into itself, greatly illustrated and confirmed, and bound upon all Men as Rules of Life ; the latter it hath as strongly guarded and enforced, by requiring under Everlasting as well as Temporal Penalties, strict Obedience to Lawful Rulers and Governors, who Enact them. So that no Man can offend against Laws either of a Moral or Positive Nature, but he likewise equally offends against the Gospel, and subjects himself to the Punishments of both. What therefore can have so great and true an influence upon the Lives and Manners of Men, render them so careful and conscientious Observers of what we term Law, as a firm and lively belief of the Gospel ? If therefore I should prove so happy, as to revive or confirm any Man's Faith, as to the Revelations of the Gospel, (a Thing complained of as much wanting in this present Age, and it is to be feared, not without Reason) an Advantage would accrue both to the Church and State.

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Having

Having thus briefly hinted. (and I hope, justify'd my Design) I proceed to fix your Attention on one great Evidence of the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Faith, and that is the great and miraculous Works, the Author of it perform'd, while here on Earth, in order to induce Mankind to believe both him and his Doctrine, and regulate their Lives according to it. We see he laid great stress on these Works, and I hope to make appear that they will bear it. In order to which, I shall as carefully as I can, Explain,

1. What a Miraculous Work is.

2dly. That some Miraculous Works are needful, to convince Men of the Truth of Religion, or a Divine Revelation.

3dly. I shall consider particularly the Miraculous Works of our Blessed Saviour, to the consideration of which, he here directs us, for the proof of his Divine Authority and Doctrine.

4thly, and Lastly, I shall examine at this distance of Time, what Evidence we have that ever such Miracles were wrought by him. Each of these Particulars I hope, will contribute something towards setting our Saviour's Miracles in a due Light.

1. I am to shew, what a Miraculous Work is, (for of this sort of Works it is our Saviour here speaketh.) Now of this there hath been much Dispute of late Years, which, as one rightly observes, over subtilty of Wit, rather than any great difficulty or necessity in the Thing it self, hath raised. For the Word implies, and I think generally the Scripture intends by it, an Effect, Wonderful and Stupendous to the Beholders. And it becomes thus, because it surpasses the fixed Laws and course of Nature; yea, in many Cases is contrary to them. Or in other Words, it requires the application and exertion of a Power and Wisdom beyond Nature, or the visible and appearing Cause to produce. So that we clearly and certainly discern a vast disproportion between them, the Effect hugely surmounting the

the force and activity of the Visible Cause; and this is what makes it appear to us Wonderful or Miraculous. To which may be rais'd these two Exceptions.

1. One is, Hence it might follow, that something inferior to the Divine Nature might work Miracles, which is a Position very Offensive to some Learned Men; and yet, which, I think, with submission, is very true; that is, when God Almighty permits, or leaves some Creatures to their own Natural Power and Abilities, Diabolical Spirits can certainly either so alter or suspend the Natural Course of Things (when no higher Principle controls them) or else so dazzle and abuse the Sense, as to raise Miraculous Appearances, of which are recorded divers Instances in Sacred Scripture. What strange things did the Magicians in the Old Testament perform? And in the New Testament our Saviour foretels of False Christs, and False Prophets, who would perform things altogether as Strange; would shew such Signs and Wonders, as would seduce, if possible, the very Elect, which was abundantly verifi'd of Simon Magus, and other Arch-Hereticks; the first of whom, the People concluded, from the surprizing things he did, the Great Power of God. But were these true and proper Miracles? It is hard to know that. But this we certainly know, that they appeared so to the Sense, and must have pass'd as such, had they not been oppos'd by the True Apostles; had they not been wrought in a different Cause, and to quite different Ends. This shew'd demonstratively, that the Apostles and these Magicians acted by a different Power, because the same Power could never so grossly contradict itself, as to act to quite opposite Ends; but what then? They both acted by a Supernatural Power, and display'd Supernatural Effects, which sure is Miraculous, although in all Encounter and Opposition, the one exceeded the other, or the Divine the Diabolical.

2dly. It may be further Objected, that if what we term a Miracle, be only a Supernatural Effect, the Consequence may be, that it will be extremely difficult to distinguish what is truly Miraculous and what not, because of the imperfection and shortness of our Knowledge, in regard to the force and operations of Nature. To which I Answer, Although we know not the utmost Bounds and Operations

of Nature, yet some of its ways of acting, some of its Laws we most certainly know, and our Ignorance of Nature in some Cases, will not destroy our certainty of it in others. For Example: Should a Man by a Word remove a Mountain; by a Word heal the Sick; yea, raise the Dead by the Breath of his Mouth; blast the most flourishing Tree; and in these, and the like Instances, did he appear perfectly Free, and to act at Discretion, notwithstanding our Ignorance of Nature, I am apt to think, that even *Spinoza* himself, would and must esteem such Effects Miraculous. For, whatsoever Nature be, we have the highest certainty, that such cannot be bare Natural Effects, there being no sort of Proportion between the Word and Breath of a Man, and such vast Things as these. Neither is there any supposition of Wit, Subtilty, or Legerdemain, that will with the least shew of Probability, solve these Matters, but necessarily must be imply'd a Power beyond what visibly appears; a Power distinct from, and independent on Nature; and Subject to none of its Laws, and which exerts itself at the Word of a Man, and is the proper Cause of such mighty Works. And this is the Miracle, this creates the Wonder.

So that it is not every little and surprizing Feat or Trick, that perhaps we know not the ways of doing, that ought to be deem'd Supernatural or Miraculous. But such an Effect as we clearly and certainly discern to surpass the Power and Ability of the visible Agent (although supposed never so Acute and Sagacious) and consequently must require for the performance of it, an invisible Hand and Power. And so far of Miracles: I pass on,

2dly. To observe, That some such miraculous Works are needful, to convince Men of the Truth of Religion, or a Divine Revelation. Our Saviour supposes this in the Text, and yields, That the *Jews* would have been excusable in rejecting both him and his Doctrine, had he not confirm'd it by such Works, as never any Man before did. And indeed have Wise Men always expected and demanded some extraordinary Works, from such as have appeared under the Character of Heavenly and Divine Messengers. For what should raise a Belief in Mankind, as to so high a Point, as one's being a Heavenly Ambassador,

dor, but some Divine and Heavenly Testimony? Miracles therefore, are at least one mark of Distinction, whereby such Men are known from Pretenders, and without which, the World would be subjected to endless Delusions and Cheats.

So that although Miracles [suspensions of the Laws of Nature, Operations contrary to Nature] are very strange and rare Effects, yet ought not the strangeness of them to prejudice us in our Belief about them: For in this Case, in the establishment of the True Religion, it is to be remembred they are the most reasonable Things in the World. Inasmuch, that if ever there were a true and Divine Revelation, without doubt, there have been true and real Miracles, the one strongly inferring the other; a Revelation being made, in order to be Known, Believed, and Obeyed by Mankind; to which End, our Reason discerneth an absolute necessity of Miracles. Upon which account, to deny the Possibility or Reality of Miracles, is to deny the Possibility and Reality of a Divine Revelation, which is a most absurd and dangerous Prejudice, a byass upon our Minds both contrary to Reason and Nature. For we may observe in the very frame and make of our Minds, that we are naturally prone to admit of some Religion, or Divine Revelation, (as appeareth evidently enough in the Practise, or at least Profession of all Nations;) And this Dictate (as I may call it) Reason, when consulted about it, confirmeth. Which certainly should pre-engage us rather in the favour of Miracles, than against them, because of the close and immediate connexion between the Truth of any Religion and some Miracles. In the midst of this constant universal pretention and Acknowledgment, that Mankind have made of some Religion, is it not strangely shocking, that none at all should be True? The very Supposition is startling, looks not like Natural or Reasonable, but a wild and frantick Thought. And I say, if it be likely, that some Religion is True, it is altogether as likely, that some Miracles are so; and a Religion that appeals to them, as an Evidence of its Truth, doth strongly bespeak our Attention and Examination.

This I mention because of the strong Prepossession that some Men seem from their Discourses to be under, against Miracles in general, as if they were all impossible, and Cheats.

Cheats. I shall not digress about the impossibility of Miracles, because a Conceit, that no Man can admit without going farther with the (a) Author of it, and denying the existence of a Deity, as well as Miracles. The Consideration of the latter, that all Miracles are feign'd, may not be so remote to our Purpose here. And I would turn these Men's serious Reflection upon the Reasons, that induc'd them to entertain such an Opinion. Is it that they never saw a Miracle? But we ask them, did they ever see a True and Divine Revelation first introduc'd? This is the Time and Occasion, in which our Reason encourageth us to expect the sight of Miracles, and if they be wanting in other Cases, in which appeareth not equal reason for them, this will prove a very weak Ground of suspecting, or denying their Reality in this. Or do the many false pretences to Miracles startle them? This is frequently suggested, and we are obliged with large Collections of this kind, of the many Tricks and Cheats, which were pass'd off upon the Heathens of Old, and do still go down with the People of the *Roman* Communion, for real Miracles, and Men's diligent attention is requir'd to them. Let us attend to them, but not draw from them consequences that they will bear? *To judge of good yllusions and sw*

(To omit that Counterfeits are better Arguments of some Truth and Reality, than of the contrary,) Do not the Exploders of all Miracles own the Falshood of the foregoing Religions? And what more likely, than that false Religions should be upheld by Artifices and Impostures? We say, that it is only in favour of the true Religion, that our Reason suggesteth the necessity of Miracles, and the true Religion is but one, and like the *Pearl of great Price*, to which its Author compares it, lyes hid and retir'd amidst many Counterfeits and Cheats, and as other Cheats do, so these commonly first offer and obtrude themselves, and if we have discovered false Miracles in any Religion, what can we justly infer, but that we have light upon one of these Impostures, that would fain pass itself off, as the true Religion; or if we be too Sagacious for that, prevents in us all farther Search and Examination? Of

(a) *Spinoza*, which

which inveiglement, we cannot be too much aware, it being equally detrimental, to be captivated by an Error, and admit of nothing true, to believe a false, or no Religion at all. Men of this Character are in little danger of believing, either *Heathenism* or *Popery*, but yet may the Forgeries of these Religions, raise in them a prejudice, that nothing is better grounded, and especially when the Mind is perpetually imploy'd about them, when Men are in perpetual quest after Forgeries in Religion, and make it the great Scope of their Study and Endeavour, as well as Pleasure to find them, whether this and other Things may not give an evil turn and byas to the Judgment, and pass upon it Truth for Forgery, I should think it not amiss, sometimes for these detectors of Forgery to consider.

In the present Case, in the disbelief of all Miracles on the foresaid Ground, that they are not under the Government of right Reason is very plain: For what poor connexion, between a concession and discovery of some Fictions, and that there were never any real Miracles? Will counterfeit Coins and adulterate Mettal argue, that there is no pure Gold and Silver, and that it is a Mis-employment of our Time to look after it? Doth a detection of Knavery in some, prove all Men Cheats? Or because *Mahomet* was an Impostor, must needs *Jesus Christ* be no better.

To what gross Mistakes and Evils would such a way of arguing expose us, in Temporal Affairs. And may not one justly fear, that the same hasty and loose way of concluding in Spiritual Matters, may at last be found, to have run us upon Evils and Mistakes, of worse and more pernicious Consequences.

If it be said here, that such counterfeit and false Miracles ought to teach us Caution, and to receive none without Examination. This I readily grant, and wish that all Men would sincerely Examine. As this is highly reasonable, so the Author of the Christian Miracles inviteth us to it, which looks as if he was under no apprehension, from the strictest and severest examination we could make, provided, it be not edg'd with a *Hatred both of himself and Father*; This indeed he cautions us against, as being the only Things that would baffle the Evidence of his Miracles,

idea, and obstruct our Belief. And it is to be hoped, we will not come to this Consideration of the Evidences of his Religion, under strong Aversions to it, under Enmity and Despight, possess'd with the Prejudice, and Malice, and Rage of Jews. If we are not blinded with these, he engages, the Light and Evidence of his Miracles will master us. Let us therefore take a View,

1^{stly}. Of the *Miraculous Works* of our Blessed Saviour, to the Consideration of which, he here directs us, for the proof of his Divine Authority and Doctrine. To give this particular the greater Force, I shall

1st. give a short view of these Miracles themselves.

2^{dly}. I shall consider before whom they were wrought.

3^{dly}. I shall observe the outward Circumstances and Condition of the Person who wrought them.

4^{thly}, and Last^{ly}: I shall take Notice to what Ends those Miracles were wrought.

I am to offer a short view of the Miracles themselves: The *New Testament* Records them, and is chiefly taken up in transmitting them to us, all which to Transcribe, would be very tedious; would engage me to read to you the greatest part of the four *Evangelists*. In speaking therefore of Miracles that you all have read and know, it will suffice to touch on them in general, and fix your Attention, on their Greatness, their Number, and Variety.

What can be greater Instances of Power, than to Cure Men Born diseased, whether Deaf, or Blind, or Dumb? Not only to rectify the Defects of a Sense, but give a new one to such as before had it not? By a mere Word, or Touch, to convey Strength and Soundness into Members, many Years Enervated, Wither'd, or totally Dead? To cleanse and heal the most inveterate Ulcers, Sores, and Leprosies, such as had baffled all Humane Art and Skill? To remove the most grievous Maladies at a distance? To

still the Winds and Seas, torment and eject Devils, and all at a Word's speaking.

But you will say, He that could enliven a single Limb, or Part, could he not likewise enliven the whole Body? Yes! This we read he did too. He rais'd several from the Dead, one whom Putrefaction had seiz'd on, and others, whose Bodies had for Ages lain moulder'd into Dust and Ashes, and undergone I know not how many Transmutations and Forms; and last of all, when expos'd as Dead on the Cross, he rais'd himself from Corruption, and the Grave. Good Lord! what a strange Efficacy accompanied his Word, to make all Things Sound or Sick, Dumb, or to Speak, Live or Die, as he pleased! Sure as great Virtue and Force was in his Word, when it effected such mighty Things, as in that (a) Omnipotent Word, which at first rais'd all Things out of Nothing.

Neither of all these stupendous Things hath he left us a single, but many Instances. Many are Recorded, but yet not near as many as he wrought; for he cured the Sick and Diseased, and the Possess'd, of whole Countries as he pass'd. And if all these Works had been committed to Writing, they would have swell'd the *New Testament* into a vast Volume. But according to this short Account, what variety do they comprehend? They in Truth shew the Author of them, acted by an unlimited Power, by a Power which render'd him Paramount to Nature, to Men and Devils, and indeed nothing less than absolute Lord of the whole Creation.

After this, to admit of Doubts, whether these Works were real Miracles or not, or enter into Disputes with Atheists and Infidels, who shew their Inclinations and Endeavours to explain them by natural Causes, would be a trifling next a-kin to theirs, who invent such (b) Conceits, and which they must needs discern, (if not quite betwixt of their Wits) to be down right Frantick.

(a) Tertull. *Apol.* p. 220.

(b) Vaninus I remember tries to account for these Miracles by effluvia issuing out of our Saviour's Body, by the Power of Imagination in such as were healed, &c. Van. Dialogues.

It may be to the purpose,
 2dly. To consider, before whom, these Miracles were wrought. For it is a very pertinent demand as to Works of this extraordinary Nature : Who saw them done ? Few or many ? Enemies or Friends ? These things contribute much to determine our Judgment about them. And the Christian Miracles receive all possible credibility, from Circumstances of this kind.

For they were wrought in the most Open and Publick manner, sometimes before great Multitudes, some Thousands of Men ; at other times, before his bitterest and most malicious Adversaries, sometimes at *Jerusalem*, the Metropolis of the *Jewish* Nation, and at their most Celebrated Feasts, in which not only that People, but many of other Countries appeared. So that all advantage had his Miracles in these Respects, they were indeed as Open and Publick as his Doctrine ; for he seldom heal'd the Souls of Men by the one, without curing their Bodies by the other.

The time too, is Diligently to be remarked, in which these Miracles were wrought. In an Age, the most Polish'd and Refined, in which Humane Reason, Wit, and Eloquence were advanced to the highest Pitch, and have left their choicest Productions. And this is not only true of *Rome* (a) which began to be less Superstitious, and fond of Wonders, than their credulous Ancestors had been, but in (b) Proportion of *Jerusalem* itself, Philosophy, Eloquence, and other Humane Arts and Accomplishments, growing into esteem, and becoming part of Men's Study there, as well as at other Places. All which render the account of our Lord's Miracles, the freer of Suspicion, it having ever been allow'd of a knowing and refined Age, that it breeds the fewest Cheats and Impostures. Such love not many Spectators, love not Multitudes, to appear in Great and Celebrated Cities, much less before Sharp-

(a) See Cicer. 2d Dial. of Divination.

(b) This appeareth from several Opinions, the Jews then held, which they had learned from Heathen Philosophers. And again from the Writings of Philo, Josephus, &c.

fought and Malicious Enemies. And sure he that could appear and stand the Examination of all these, must be secure against all detection. We read indeed of Wonders wrought by others; but where? Before whom? Generally in Corners, in (a) Barbarous and Ignorant Places, and Times, which may afford abundant room for Cheats. But *Jerusalem* was a great City, and *Rome* a far greater, and yet the Philosophy, Policy, Malice of the one and the other, never detected our Saviour's Miracles of Artifice.

3dly. It may not be improper here to observe the outward Circumstances and Condition of the Person who wrought these Miracles, and they were such as could afford him no human Help or Assistance.

Had they been said, to have been wrought by some great King, or very acute and eminent Philosopher, (altho' to no Earthly Power or Wit could such astonishing Effects, as these of our Saviour have been with any colour of Reason imputed, yet because such Talents have been found capable of doing things, which others have either accounted or represented as Miraculous) this might prove ground of Suspicion to Men of after Ages, whether the Christian Miracles had any higher or more certain Original or Foundation. For the World is thoroughly convinc'd, that Kings and Great Men have always Instruments enough ready to carry on their Designs, of what Nature soever; and if Vanity and Glory, or Reasons of State, should raise in them a desire of being acknowledg'd for Prophets, or Workers of Miracles, no doubt, many would be found, who would chearfully lend a helping Hand to the Cheat. And when a great Emperor or King is pleas'd to think or say, that he wrought a Miracle, who dares to Examine, Question, or Contradict it? In many Ages past, instead of the People's being backward to admit of such a Pretention in Kings, we know, they would extend their Complement much farther, and not only receive them for Prophets, but Gods, if they de-

(a) This is true of the pretended Miracles amongst the Heathens, and even of those in Popish Countries. The Epicureans were seldom invited to see the one, or Protestants the other. And indeed the Miracles of both arose in a most superstitious and ignorant Age.

fied it. Who therefore can deny, that the Miracle of the
 Emperor *Vespasian* and others, under this View, appears
 a little Suspicious? But this by the by. So again, had our
 Lord all his Life made Philosophy, and other Parts of Hu-
 mane Learning, his great Study and Profession, and thus
 acquired a great Name and Reputation, and drawn to him-
 self a good Number of Scholars, of the most bright and
 acute Parts, who might have assisted him in any Measures
 and Intréagues, which would have turn'd to their mutual
 Interest and Honour, no one can doubt, but this might have
 been Matter of Cavil and Suspicion (altho' of no proof)
 against his Miracles, and for the Reason before mention'd,
 because Philosophers too, as well as Kings, have been said
 to have perform'd some surprizing and strange Things.
 But surely with that Wisdom hath Divine Providence ad-
 justed and set off our Saviour's Character, as to leave no
 room of reasonable Suspicion or Distrust. For instead of
 appearing with these external Advantages, which both the
 Jews and Gentiles thought hugely becoming his Pretensions,
 and greatly wanted in him, to the surprize of that Age,
 but to the great Satisfaction and Conviction of all after
 Ages, who should be more disengaged, and at Liberty to
 consider, he is represented in Circumstances quite the con-
 trary to all this, Born of poor Parents, following a Labo-
 rious Life and Calling, indeed employ'd in the Work-House
 of his Father a *Carpenter* (and known to be such by his
 own Nation) and not in the Courts of Kings, or Schools
 of Philosophers. What Charm or Allurement had this in
 it, to Great and Acute Men, to follow or assist him? Cer-
 tainly none at all, and so it fell out. All such turn'd their
 Backs upon him, despised and opposed him; and conse-
 quently instead of receiving any assistance from Humane
 Power, Wit, or Learning, he had all these against him,
 and it became a high Scandal. Nothing less than Excom-
 munication to joyn with him, or even to express but the
 least favourable Opinion of him. And who were they
 that joyned with him? Did any of the Scribes and Pha-
 risees, of the Rulers, or such as had any great Matters to
 loose? Whatsoever some few might think, it is hard to
 find any of these who openly acknowledg'd him. Only
 the Poor, the Ignorant of the Law, and such as they account-
 ed

ed *enſed*, durſt do this. And out of theſe his Train was compoſed, Twelve Men eſpecially Elected, not for any Natural Capacity, for any Courage, or Wit, or Learning, that appear'd in them, ſuperior to the reſt, but out of meer diſdain of theſe Talents, and to cut off all ſurmiſe of Human Help or Aſſiſtance. Nay, to demonſtrate to us farther yet, how clear his Miracles were of all Artifice, one of theſe Twelve Apoſtles, a Man the moſt capable of Frauds, and the moſt likely to be entruſted with them, had his Maſter practiſed any; through the wiſe Providence of God, this Man was permitted to Fall off, Deſert, and Betray him. And when in the Hands of our Saviour's Enemies, and had all encouragement and temptation of Reward, What did he diſcover? Any Cheats, any Impoſtures of his Maſter? When they ſtood in ſo much need of Falſe Witneſſes, did he come in and prove his Accuſer at the Bar of Pilate? Alas! how exceeding fond would the High Priests and Sanhedrim have been of that? How would they have cheriſhed and hugg'd ſuch a forwardneſs in Judas, and how ſpecious had been the Cauſe of Infidelity now; in ſome Men's Hands, if ſo it had been but barely reported to after Ages! But we find, inſtead of being able to perpetrate ſo great a Crime, to go on in his Wickedneſs, and appear an Evidence againſt our Saviour, he ſunk down under the Burden of what he had already done, confeſſ'd his own Guilt, and his Maſter's Innocency, and went out from them, and proved his own Executioner. And theſe Thoughts, I hope, contribute ſomething towards clearing our Saviour's Miracles from all Jugling and Impoſture. What means or likelihood of this, in ſo poor and abject a Condition, under ſuch Circumſtances, and with ſuch Followers?

ably, and Laſtly. Let us examine to what Ends thoſe Miracles were wrought. And that will beſt appear, by conſidering the Uſe the Author makes of them: And that is very clearly, to eſtabliſh in Men a belief, that he was ſent of God, with Authority to inſtruct them, in the Divine Nature, Will, and Laws, and the Conſequences of their Obedience or Diſobedience to them. And what are thoſe Laws or Doctrines, which in the Virtue of thoſe Miracles,

racles, he would persuade all Men to receive, as Divine. Surely such as appear to the unbiass'd Dictates of Human Reason, Wise, Holy, Good and Useful, every way calculated to the Benefit of Men; most suitable to, and worthy of the great Being, to whom he ascribes them. So that if ever any Revelation came from God, this most unquestionably has by far the best Title to it, because its Contents not only correspond to, but strongly argue its Author. And own indeed, that some Men have objected, that in our Saviour's Religion are found Mysteries, but these in truth to Wiser Heads, have rather prov'd Recommendations of it, than Objections, because the Voice of impartial Reason, about such Matters as the Gospel Treats of, is evidently for Mysteries, and not against them. But I speak here of the Morals, and general Design of the Gospel; these stand approved by the Sentiments of the Wiser Men, who have liv'd before, or after it.

So that we cannot, I should think, but acknowledge, that these Miracles were wrought to make Men Wise, and Venerable here, and everlastingly Happy thereafter. Ends we must confess, that are every way worthy of the Divine Majesty. And this is certainly a very good Rule of Judging, in the Virtue of what Power any Miracles are wrought. For no Man can think, but in direct Contradiction to the brightest Dictates of his own Mind, that infinite Wisdom should exert itself, and especially Miraculously, to no Ends at all, not very Trifling, Silly, and Vicious ones. If a Man therefore displays, what has the outward appearance of a miraculous Effect; a proper Question it always is, What use he makes of it? If none at all, or a very bad one, he may have perhaps the assistance of a vain, trifling, and wicked Spirit, but not of the Divine: He may have the Devil's Power and Commission, but not God's; because to corrupt, confound, or amaze the Minds of Men, (which are the only Ends that such Miracles can compass) are suitable enough to the Nature and Designs of Fallen and corrupted Spirits, but can never be reconciled to the Pure and Eternal Spirit of God. And hence the Miracles of Apollonius and others, were undoubtedly either Humane or Diabolical Frauds, and so were esteemed by the Silly Christians, because they establish nothing, but what

Reason rejects, as Folly and Impiety, and therefore perhaps were never wrought at all, or for certain were never wrought by God. The finding out therefore these Cheats, is only the discovery of a very likely Thing, the things aim'd at by them, being gross Cheats themselves, but the Christian Miracles will not fall with these, in the Opinion of Wise Men, which have nothing in View, but Truth and Holiness. For, as the impious and absurd Ends, to which these Heathen Miracles point, render them suspected of Fraud somewhere, so do the Excellent Ends, to which our Saviour's Miracles are directed, render them to be the more likely, to be True and Certain.

I pass on to the *Fourth*, and last Thing to be spoken to; to examine at this distance of Time, What Evidence we have that ever such Miracles were wrought by our Blessed Saviour. Now, for this we have the highest Evidence and Certainty that the Thing will admit of; the very next Certainty at least, to what we term Ocular Demonstration or Sight.

This Latter, it is to be presumed, that we will not expect. For, for the same Reason, that any of us may expect to see such Miracles every Age; Yea, every individual Man may expect to see them. And then in vain, would the Almighty have settled Laws of Nature, in the first Origin of Things, and display'd his Wisdom in their beautiful and harmonious Order and Operations. These constant and perpetual Miracles would much disturb them, and almost juggle Nature out of Being, and Human Observation; and perhaps Religion at last would loose as much Evidence by them, as it would gain. For may it not be feared, that this frequency of Miracles would render Men less Attentive to them, less Convinced and Acted upon by them? They seem'd to have had this stupifying Effect upon the *Jews*. For they living under a constant course of Miracles, appear to have regarded them no more, than Men do now the standing and fixed Laws of Nature. For the rareness of Miracles doth not a little contribute towards the Astonishment they produce, and they become Ordinary and Uneffectual Things, when once made Common. To omit here, that the Miracles of Jesus Christ (of which we are speaking) are in their own Nature, incapable

able of being display'd to the sight of all Ages and
 unless we suppose it reasonable and fitting, that our
 should Travel throughout the whole Globe in Person,
 visit every Country, Place, and Man; yea, and Live
 Die, and Rise from the Dead in every Place; which
 all frantick Suppositions. And yet, were they Possible,
 could be granted, I doubt still, all could not see the
 Things, but some at last, if they Believed at all, must be-
 lieve other's Testimony about them. I hope I have no need
 to use more Words about this: For who will own
 shameless and absurd a thing, as to believe nothing, be-
 what he sees?

Presuming therefore, that other Evidence than that of
 Sight, will convince us, I come to shew you, what other
 Evidence there is, for the belief of our Saviour's Miracles.

Now, Miracles, as I said, being Matters of Fact, the
 most immediate and special Evidence they can have, is the
 Testimony of others. Now, this we have in the fullest and
 most ample manner, Thousands were Witnesses of some of
 those Miracles that our Saviour wrought. But I shall on-
 ly here consider the Evidence of the Apostles, who were
 especial Witnesses of all his Works, and chosen by him to
 testify to others, what they had Seen and Heard. They
 both Preach'd and Wrote a short Account of these Mira-
 cles, from whom we receive them, and on whose Testi-
 mony our Faith is grounded.

Now, three Things will give the greatest Certainty to
 any Men's Testimony, in relation to Matters of Fact. If
 the Writers of them were Eye-witnesses. If they be of
 competent Understanding. And lastly, If Honest, Good,
 and Sincere Men. The Wit of Man cannot devise any
 Qualifications, which can render Mens Testimony as to
 Matters of Fact, more Credible and Unquestionable: And
 all these, the Witnesses of our Saviour's Miracles had, in
 more extraordinary Degrees, than ever any other Men
 had.

1st. They were Eye-witnesses of these Miracles. They
 Acquaint us, they tell us, with nothing, but what they
 themselves Heard and Saw. And this is an Advantage,
 that other Historians seldom have, and when they have it,

gives their Relations exceedingly the greater Credibility. Where this is wanting, and an Historian Writes of Things done, perhaps some hundred Years before his own Time, hardly can we arrive at any great Certainty about them, it being necessary to attend to, and be resolved in so many things, as the Wisdom, Abilities, and Honesty, of such as wrote before him, about which Matters frequently we are much in the Dark, and can know little. But when a Man says, he saw such and such Facts with his own Eyes, what can we say then? The Matter is then brought into a much narrower compass, and we have nothing farther to Examine, unless whether the Relator be a Man fit to be believed, upon the score of his Understanding, and Vertue; and if this strongly appears too, we have the highest Certainty that History can give us. Thus with great Wisdom did our Lord choose Twelve Men especially, always to follow and accompany him, that they might see and hear what he Said and Did, and so might relate nothing but upon their own Knowledge.

Let us see 2dly. Whether they were Men of Competent Understanding and Judgment, as to the Matters they relate. This secures them from being deceived themselves, and consequently from obtruding their own Mistakes on others. Now, how illiterate soever these Men were, at their first joyning with their Master, it is very certain, that afterwards, some way or other, they mightily Improved: For, who can read their Writings, without acknowledging them Men of some Capacity and Judgment? They Discourse perhaps not with the Ornament of Philosophers, yet with greater Exactness and Truth, which is the best Test of a Man's Judgment, as the other is of one's Wit or Learning. But whatsoever Opinion we entertain of the Apostle's Judgment, we must needs esteem them competent Witnesses of the Things they attest; for these being Matters of Fact, they need no higher Qualifications to be assured about them, than a right use of their Sight and Senses: No great accuracy of Judgment is necessary for a Man to be certain of what he sees; because this is resolved not so much into the rectitude of his Understanding, as his Senses. So for Example; If

a Man peremptorily affirms such or such a Doctrine to be True, it will have little Effect upon By-standers, especially if he be a Man accounted of no great Capacity, for then this signifies only his bare Persuasion about such a Point; and we know of what false Persuasions the Understandings of Men are capable. But if a Man affirms, he saw or heard such a Thing, though never so Ignorant, if no Natural Fool or Mad-man, if Honest and Sincere, his Words will have more Weight, will pass current with Wiser Men than himself. And, why is this? Certainly because, in this dark corrupted State, we can better trust a Man's Sight, than his Reason or Judgment. And about such Things it is, that the Apostles Witness to the World, Things that they Heard and Saw, and nothing can render their Testimony suspected, but Distraction or Dishonesty. The latter, I presume, we will not urge. It remains therefore,

3^{dly}. To consider their Honesty and Integrity, and if we can establish this too, we shall have a stronger Reason yet, that they were not Deceived themselves in the Relations they give us.

We have observed already, that the Apostles were Eye-witnesses of these Miracles of their Master; and again, that Miracles are Matters of Fact, about which they could not be Deceived, unless with their own consent; and this they could not do, if Honest and Sincere Men. And there is no middle Way. If they were not Honest and Sincere Men, they were of the most desperate and hardened Wickedness; they were one or the other in the greatest Extrems: If we cannot believe the former of them, we must necessarily conclude them the latter, Men as depraved in their Morals, as ever were. For this Idea of them will the supposition of their wilfully deceiving us, in these Points, necessarily give us.

Now, as touching their Honesty and Sincerity; if the most strict Profession and Life, if the greatest correspondence between Mens Words and Actions, will denote any thing, the Apostles were Men of a Holy and upright Character; for from them flow'd the most excellent and perfect Morals, the strongest, the most pressing Arguments to observe them: Their Writings afford the World Principles

ples and Hints, whereby the Errors of the Greatest Philosophers and States-men stand detected and reformed, and their Practices and Lives were of a Piece; extraordinary Patterns and Recommendations of what they taught: To propagate it, they Travel'd throughout the Earth, were exposed to innumerable Dangers; to innumerable Evils and Hardships, and at last submitted themselves to the most cruel Deaths. So that if they were Hypocrites and Deceivers, they were the most strange and unaccountable Deceivers, that ever appear'd on the Theatre of the World.

But to come closer to the purpose; What stronger Arguments can we have of Men's Sincerity and Truth, than that no Pleasures nor Rewards on one side, no Threatnings, Punishments, no, nor the most cruel Deaths on the other, could either seduce or terrify them from what they relate? A Man may Lye indeed in order to save his Estate and Life, but What should induce a Man to Lye to the ruine of both? Surely no Temporal Consideration. Some Nations have made use of Racks to extort Truth, and very frequently they have proved a means, although a cruel one, of its discovery, and then the greatness of the Pain and Torture, hath often drawn Confessions from Men, altho' to their own Ruine. And in this Case, is seen the force of exquisite Pains to unlock Secrets. And again, 'tis possible although seldom, that some Men may persist in Falshoods under severe Tortures, but it is with hopes of concealing Crimes, whose discovery would take away their Reputation, Estates, and Lives. But that any Man, much less a number of Men, should agree together to concert and publish Lyes, and persist in them, yea, chuse to do it, in order to destroy their Lives, when a confession of the Truth would save them, and accumulate Rewards and Honours on them besides, verily this to me appeareth so Romantick a thing, as is beyond all President and Example; beyond all possibility of being practis'd by Men, under the influence of Common Sense or the more general Passion of Self-preservation. In this Case they shew themselves, that is, if they knowingly and wilfully persisted in the attestation of Untruth, Men most passionately mad after an odd kind of Glory, that ever liv'd, even beyond the Example of

Cæsar or *Alexander*, and so were truly the most Unmortify'd Men, yea, the most harden'd and obstinate Sinners that ever Lived or Died, (for what hardness is here that could persist in Falshood and Lyes, under the most painful Deaths!) and yet notwithstanding this boundless thirst of Fame, they acted contrary to all the ways that could procure it; took Methods that then did certainly, and according to all Human Foresight, must for ever make them Scandalous. The Sum is this.

If Men say, that they saw things done, and were in their right Minds and Senses, and withal were Honest and Sincere, and for the proof of what they saw, would die the most painful Deaths, and not only said this, but actually suffered them: If all this be Fact, must we not believe the Testimony of these Men? I hope, I am duly aware, before whom I speak, and yet I durst appeal to the *Honourable Persons* before me, who are Judges of the Evidence of Facts, whether ever any had greater, or near so great: And when they determin of the Lives and Fortunes of Men, with so great Honour to themselves, as well as Usefulness to the Publick, whether all this be not done, upon much less Evidence than that, on which the Miracles of Jesus Christ stand. All the difference is, we hear not the Apostles asserting these Miracles *Viva Voce*, nor see them pouring out their Blood in confirmation of them. But who can doubt, that they did so, when the (*) Enemies of Christianity, who liv'd soon after, never question'd or deny'd it? When it is own'd by all, that the main Subjects of the Apostles Preaching, were these very Miracles, and particularly his Resurrection from the Dead. That the

(*) *As to the Heathens; Celsus, Julian, Hierocles, who wrote against the Christian Religion, own our Saviour wrought Miracles. See Origen against Celsus. Origen contra Cels. l. 1. p. 30. Julian. Cyr. l. 6. Euseb. contra Hier. The Jews imputed imputed our Saviour's Miracles to Magick, &c. Of which Arnobius contra Gentes. l. 1 331. Huet. Demon. Evan. p. 500.*

Apostles did not testify these Things, cannot be now, nor ever was heretofore doubted; so far from this, that the bitterest opposers of Christianity and of the Apostles, both Jews and Heathens have yielded to the Truth of their Testimony, and unanimously acknowledg'd the Miracles of Jesus Christ, although they account for them through the Power of Magick, and other extravagant Ways.

Now if the Doctrines, if the Pains and Travels, if the Lives and Deaths if such Considerations will clear the Apostle's Character, will rescue them from the number of the worst of Men, the worst Deceivers, and greatest Impostors, will make their Word pass for any thing, if in the Virtue of these Things, we esteem them but barely Honest Men, (as I should think we must believe them, or believe none to be such) we must believe of them much more, and our Faith and Reliance on them, will have a much firmer Foundation and Security, than what the greatest Sincerity and Honesty can give us. For if through a Persuasion of their Virtue and Integrity, we believe them in regard to their Master's Miracles, (which is the Point I have been urging) we have equal Reason to believe them about themselves, and especially when they assert with the same assurance that they had this very Gift likewise, and could, and did work many and great Miracles. This will argue them possess'd of the Divine Spirit, and consequently present them to our Minds, under a high and exalted Character; raise them above the Wisest and most Virtuous Men, and make their Testimony, instead of Humane, become Divine and Infallible. Thus all suspicions of Weakness, Misunderstanding and other Humane Imperfections vanish, and our Faith, as it is not resolved at last into the *Wisdom*, so neither the Word of Man but of God, and consequently to doubt, disbelieve, or deny the Truth of what they affirm, will be according to the most strict Reasoning a calling God's Truth and Veracity into question, and as the Scripture expresses it, to *make him a Lyar*. And that according to our Saviour's Promise, his Apostles had this Power of Miracles, will receive yet some farther confirmation, from the unanimous Consent and Testimony of the Fathers, who

say, that this (a) Gift remain'd in the Church for some Hundreds of Years.

I shall now make a Reflection or two upon what hath been said.

And 1st. This I hope shews us very clearly the Wickedness and Absurdity, of what Men term Deism, a Conceit, which professes to own the Being of a God, but denies all Revelation from him, and accordingly places the Christian Revelation in the List of Cheats and Impostures, which was began at first, and is still upheld by Priest-Craft. The Men who adventure to Talk at this rate, seem fond of the Title of close Reasoners, and free Thinkers, which, whether they deserve or not, I will not here Dispute, only it appeareth a little strange, methinks, that such sharp and clear Sighted Men (whose penetration nothing can escape) should not discern the close Connexion between a God and a Divine Revelation. For if a God; it is very likely that he made the World, and if he made it, what more likely, than that he governs it? Thus are (b) Creation and Providence very clearly deduced from the very Notion of a God. This is what even Priests can discern and maintain, and we admire acuter Men should not. And again, if there be a Providence, it seems strange to us, that this Providence should never concern itself, in informing and

(a) That this Gift remain'd in the Church after the Decease of the Apostles, is Unanimously asserted. See Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho. p. Rob. Step. Ed. 50. He makes it an Argument of the Truth of Christianity, that by the Name of Christ, Devils were Tormented and Ejected. Again Apology 1. To the same Purpose, he appeals to the Cures wrought in the City of Rome, for the Truth of Christianity. See Irenæus. l. 2. c. 188. Tertullian says, the Christians have Cured even their Enemies the Heathens, and Challenges them to produce in Publick any one Possess'd, and submits the Cause of Christianity to this Tryal, as they cured him or not. Tertull. Apol. Origen affirmeth, that he himself hath seen many Cured of Possession and Madness, and innumerable other Distempers, by the Name of Christ. Origen. Contra. Cels. p. 124. Cypr. p. 328. 335. Minuc. Felix.

(b) Athenag. Leg. pro Christian. p. 35. Justin Martyr, A. pol. 132.

directing

directing Reasonable Creatures, in futable Actions and De-
 voirs towards himself, to whom they stand so much in-
 debted and obliged. There are Laws establish'd for the
 guidance of insensible Matter, and is it not Surprizing,
 that there should be none for the guidance of Reasonable
 Creatures? They will say perhaps, Reason is to guide
 them. I shall only Answer, what a certain guide bare Rea-
 son is, all Ages will testify, which have been left solely to
 its Direction, without any assistance from what we term
 Revelation; and one may very justly suspect, had there
 been no such thing as Revelation at all, Reason had been
 much worse, than it is now or ever was, altho' it has been,
 and is still, very bad. So that altho' without a Divine
 Revelation, there might be a Providence, yet a very im-
 perfect one, the prime and chiefest Object of it being
 struck out of it, the Actions of Men under no certain
 Rule, but left to the influence of Casualty and Chance, or
 their own uncertain Wills. No! But of our Reason will
 these Men still say, But is not Humane Reason corrupt?
 And if we allow the Interposition of Providence, in Case
 of any Defects or Deviation of the Laws of Nature;
 may we not with equal Reason expect, and argue a Di-
 vine Revelation to supply the Defects, and Disorders of
 Humane Reason?

But how will these close Reasoners evade the force of
 other Evidences of the Christian Revelation, and especi-
 ally this here of its Miracles? Is not this something very
 particular? Not at all they will tell you. Nothing is
 more common, than such Pretences to Miracles. The old
 Heathens pretended to them, in support of their Idola-
 try. And the present Roman Church have enough of them
 in their *Legends*. But is there no difference between the
 Christian Miracles and these? — — — There are Laws —
 They care not to speak out, but so they would have us be-
 lieve.

Presuming therefore that we rightly take their meaning,
 we will proceed to examine the Weight of it, and briefly
 compare these pretended Miracles with our Saviour's, accord-
 ing to the Observations we have before made upon them.

And First, what were those Miracles, said to be wrought
 amongst the Heathens? We read them in *Livy*, *Cicero*,
 and

and other Prophane Writers. They are such as these. That an Ox was heard to speak such or such a Year, that a Voide was heard, that it rain'd Blood at one time, Stones at another. That *Esculapius* appear'd in the form of a Serpent, &c. Will any Man pretend, that such as these for Greatness and Variety, bear any Resemblance to the Works of Jesus Christ? Is this like curing the Deaf, the Blind, the Lame, Dumb, and all the Diseased, of whole Towns and Countries? Like feeding Multitudes with a few Loaves? Stilling the Winds and Seas, raising the Dead at a Word's Speaking? Or doth any Historian altho' never so Fabulous, say, that ever a Man came to *Rome*, or any other Place, and shew'd such Instances of a Miraculous Power, as those Recorded of Jesus Christ in the Gospels? Were this asserted. Yet where were these Heathen Miracles said to be wrought, and before whom? In a refined Age and Place, before Multitudes, before the most sharp-sighted and Malicious Enemies? Do the Vouchers of these Miracles Say this? We shall hardly find it. These very opposers of Christ's Miracles at other times, sufficiently acquaint us, (when it makes to expose Priests) with the Superstition and Credulity of the Heathen World, and the gross Darkness and Ignorance of the Popish times, which introduc'd those Fabulous Storys on both. But would the Comparison hold in the foregoing Respects: Is there not a wide difference between the End, the Christian Miracles have in View, and the pretended ones of others? What do the Heathen Miracles establish? Any sound and becoming Notions of God, any suitable Worship of him? Quite the reverse. If they establish any thing at all, it is the most Idolatrous, Absurd, and Abominable Practices. And as the scope of the Miracles, amongst the Heathens of Old, were to corrupt Natural Religion, so what do Popish ones do now but oppose, and corrupt the revealed, or true Christianity? But let us go on with the Comparison. Granting the Heathen and other Miracles could so far vie with the Christian, yet sure will they fail upon other Con-

(1) Of the difference of the Miracles of Jesus Christ, and other Pretenders. see *Iren.* p. 188. *Arnob.* p. 24.

considerations and Questions. As we farther ask, (about the Authors who give us the Accounts of them, and in whose Writings they are found, and on whom we rely) what do we know of them? Of what estimation are they? Are their Characters every way as good as those of the Apostles, and render their Relations as Credible? The main stress of the Point lieth here. For doubtless, a Man may sit down and invent a Romance, and make some Man in it, as eminent for Miracles as Jesus Christ, but it would not be so easy to make others believe it. But further, as touching the Relaters of our Deist's Miracles;

Do they pretend to say, and doth every thing conspire with it to make us believe, they were Eye-Witnesses of them? No! They generally liv'd many Years or Ages after these Facts were pretended to be done. They will say, perhaps, that many saw them; but upon what Authority they say this is a great Question; however they saw them not themselves; and Write not upon their own, but others Knowledge, or Testimony which is short of their Competitors the Apostles.

But had they said, they had seen them, what Reasons should induce us to believe them? We must ask the *Deists* again, Have their Vouchers of false Miracles, as great and extraordinary Characters for Truth and Holiness, as the Apostles? Have they demonstrated this to the World, by teaching Mankind any such Pure and Excellent Rules of living? By undergoing such Travels, Hardships, and Dangers to Propagate it? Do their Lives upon Record, appear equally Virtuous? Did the Publishers of these Fabulous Stories ever pretend to work Miracles, as Proofs of a Divine Assistance, and in order to secure us, that they did not, nor could Err in their Relations? In a Word, did ever *Titus Livius*, or any other of these Historians pretend, to suffer, and much less actually suffer the most Painful Death, in Vindication of their Testimony? Instead of this, they would endanger and lose nothing about these Matters, and for good Reason, if the Criticism of some (a) Men be good, that they believed them not themselves. Little

(a) Mr. Toland, *Deisidajmon*.

indeed is known of these Authors, and what is known of some of them, is not much to their Advantage ; but of the Apostles, we certainly know, that by their great Labours they propagated a Religion, which Religion standeth to this Day, and may be examin'd by any Man, whether Good or Bad, and consequently whether it makes any thing for the Credit of its Authors.

Thus I have touch'd upon several Advantages, that are peculiar to the Christian Miracles, and render them Credible, and so far are these Heathen or Popish Miracles, from having the same in all Respects, that I am Confident, that in no two Instances, can an agreement be shewn between them ; and examining them by the foresaid Marks, as widely different will they appear, one from the other, as the Story of Dr *Faustus*, and of St. *George*, doth, from the most Credible History or Record, when set opposite to it. And sure a pleasant way of Arguing it were (or rather of Men's deceiving themselves, in Matters of so great Moment) to conclude from such idle Tales or Romances, against all History, and by such a Medium to think to Blast and Destroy all the Credit of it.

Let me therefore 2dly. With the utmost seriousness exhort you, to give no Ear, to such vain Principles and Sophistry, which visibly aim to weaken your Faith, as to the Christian Revelation. It is a lamentable thing, that such cautions should be needful, but too many Things demonstrate them to be so. For what Books are more Industriously spread, more in Reputation (and it is to be feared) more in Men's Hands, than such as most Audaciously teach Infidelity and Wickedness, and Labour to undermine the Foundations of our Faith ? Than such as represent all Religion as *Priest-Craft*. and the Universities of the Realm as a *Den of Thieves*, rather than Schools of good Learning and Divinity ? Are there no such Authors passing, or have they no Abettors ? I heartily wish my self mistaken, that this was all pannick Fear, and that all Men were sound Believers.

This License of the Press hath been, and is much complained of by Good Men. And is not there not great Reason ? For if the Young Gentlemen of the Nation are Poison'd with

with these Principles, when the Publick hath need of them, and they appear in great Posts, and Offices, and act their Parts in them, what can be expected from them? What can Infidelity yield hereafter, but what it visibly yieldeth now, all sorts of Wickedness and Irreligion? Can an Infidel or Atheist of any Party whatsoever whether *High or Low* (for I trouble myself not about that Matter here) be greatly depended on or trusted? Yes, just so far as his Interest leads him, which will be very frequently to Pillage and Devour the Publick.

To talk of Reformation, of Honesty, Generosity, a Publick Spirit, and the like, without Principles, what a Folly is it? To pretend to encourage Morality, and reform the Nation, yet allow downright Blasphemous Opinions, Principles directly contrary to all Revealed Religion; what Hypocrisy and Grimace, in the Judgment of all Wise and Good Men! a notable Way, no doubt, a notable Effect it must have, to build strictness of Life, upon looseness of Belief; to labour to stop the Streams, and keep open and encourage the Fountain. If the Apostles had thus *Reformed*, hardly would their Labours have had so great Success.

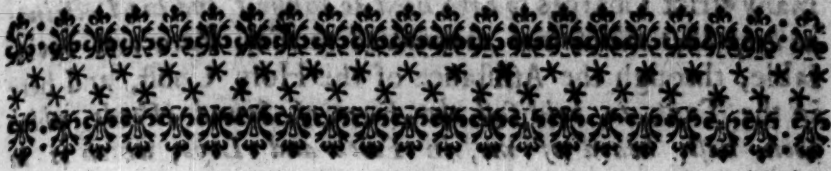
All that I could ever find urged for this, is, that matters of Belief are very Controvertible and Uncertain. Let them be so; yet I hope however Infidelity standeth no uncertain Point in Scripture, neither will any Man pretend to prove it from thence.

To conclude, as nothing teaches true Vertue like the Christian Religion, so nothing enforces the Practice of it, upon such Motives and Obligations. And did we in good Earnest believe it, as we outwardly profess, what Effects would it have upon us! How Just, and Humble, and Meek, and Charitable, and Peaceable, would it make us in our Conversations and Intercourses one with another! In a Word, how Conscientious and Punctual in the discharge of the Duties that our particular Callings, Employments, or Characters exacted from us! And what a Happiness would this introduce, not only on ourselves, but the Publick! If private Friendship is not able to subsist without Virtue, (as all Men teach who have employ'd their Thoughts on this Subject) how much less can a Multitude hold to-

gether, and consist without it? If two Men cannot long agree without Virtuous Dispositions, how necessary must these appear to be, towards the Support and Happiness of a Community? Virtue is the firmest Cement of all Society, and therefore Infidelity which destroys the strongest Obligations to Virtue, is the greatest Pest to it, dissolves the Nerves of Government, introduces Discord, private Bods and Interest, and all other Vices which render a Nation Miserable: And therefore, surely, very unworthy, is it, either of our Embracement or *Toleration*. And if we feel the Effects of these Destructive Things, to what Cause can we impute them, but a disbelief of the Christian Revelation? At least a firm belief of Christianity (as weak a Thing as some represent it) would be the effectual Cure of all our Evils, and failing to make us Happy hereafter (as these Men Suggest) yet would make us Happy here. So that always will it be useful, to inculcate Christianity upon a Nation, but never more than when it Groans under the effects of its own Vices. But what extraordinary Views doth Infidelity afford us? Indeed from the Concernment that some Men are under to Propagate it, one would imagine some mighty Good would arise to a Nation from it.

I pray God to defeat their Purposes; to remove all Prejudices that may hinder the Glorious Light of the Gospel shining in upon us; and every Day advance the Kingdom of his Son,

S E R M. II.



SERMON II.

2 Epist. to TIMOTHY, Chap. i. ver. 13.

Hold fast the Form of Sound Words, which thou hast heard of me, in Faith and Love, which is in Christ Jesus.

THE Apostle when he wrote this Epistle, was under grievous Hardships and Persecutions. But this was no new Thing to him, the Holy Ghost having before instructed him, that it was what he was every where to expect, Bonds and Imprisonments being the usual Treatment that the People gave him, wherever he came. So that he doth not make any great matter of this, but rather complaineth of the evil Effect it had on his Friends and Followers, how soon his Disgrace and Imprisonment had scattered and estranged them from him; so that among all his Disciples and Acquaintance, there was but one, who had Courage and Fidelity enough to Own and Assist him in his great Straits and Necessities.

This great Tergiversation and Fearfulness, which then Christians were subject to, together with his apprehension of his own sudden departure out of this World, seem the especial Causes which moved the Apostle with that mighty Warmth

Warmth and Zeal, to urge on *Timothy*, Constancy and Perseverance in the Christian Faith; that he gives him so many strict Charges to take heed to himself and his Doctrine; to keep that which was committed to him, Pure and Inviolable, through the Assistance of the Holy Ghost, and here in the Text, to hold fast the Form of Sound Words, which thou hast heard of me, in Faith and Love, which is in Christ Jesus.

In speaking to which Words, I shall confine myself to these three Things.

1st. To shew, what is imply'd by this Form of Sound Words, which *Timothy* had so strictly in Charge, to hold fast.

2^{dly}. From whence this Form of Sound Words was derived to *Timothy*: The Form of Sound Words, says the Apostle, that thou hast heard of me.

3^{dly}. To draw some suitable Inferences from the whole.

1st. I shall endeavour to explain what is imply'd by this Form of Sound Words, which *Timothy* had so strictly in Charge, to hold fast. The Word we render Form is *υπογραμμις*, which according to most Commentators, is a term of Art, and used by Painters and Limners, to denote the first Strokes or Delineaments of any Object, or Person that they would Paint or represent to the Sight; the rough Draught, as we use to say, in which are all the distinguishing Lines, and prevailing Features, and indeed the whole Design of any Work express'd. What Artificers do on Cloth, or the like, it seems St. Paul had done on the Mind of *Timothy*, imprinted there a general Idea of the Christian Faith, in which was contained all the material or necessary Parts and Branches of it; so that at any time by turning to it, and consulting it, by comparing with it his own, or other Men's Doctrines, he could not fail of making a right Judgment, either as to the Truth or Falshood of them. This Form was to be his great Rule and Direction; as a Teacher perhaps he might be allowed to add Colours, or enliven this rough Draught, to Polish, Exemplify, or Un-

fold

told more particularly ; to shew and explain in different Lights, according to proper Occasions or Motives : But he must be sure in doing this, not to sink, or depress, to obliterate, to add to, any one new Feature or Line ; for these were all formed to his Hand.

What then is this *Form of sound Words* ? What can it be but a Summary of the Christian Faith ; all the main, the necessary, essential, or fundamental Parts of it ? It consisted of two General Heads or Branches, *Faith and Love*, and whatsoever the Apostle had delivered as to Christianity, might be referr'd to, and ranged under one of them ; and if any Doctrines, appearing under the Style and Character of Christian Revelations, did not aptly conform to one of these, and naturally fall in under them, they were to be rejected as Adulterate and Spurious. And again, Faith, although a Term of a large extent, and comprehends many things under it, yet if any Doctrine advanced, as necessary to be believed, did not, in its Natural Consequence, produce Love, or Christian Charity, it deviated from the Apostle's *Form of sound Words*, was no part of that general Idea of Faith, which he had given *Timothy* ; the peculiar and genuine Operation of which, was *to work by Love*. This was constantly the benign Fruit of that Faith, which the Apostle Preach'd, as indeed he had before in his former Epistle instructed *Timothy*, where the Gospel is represented under the same General Division (a) of *Charity and Faith unfeigned*. The same Notion of Christianity had that Apostolical Man *Ignatius*, (b) τὸ γὰρ ὅλον ἐστὶ πίσις καὶ ἀγάπη. The whole is Faith and Love ; and whatsoever Christianity teaches, may be resolved into one of these Heads.

I am upon the first of these, that of *Faith*.

Now, this, as I said, is a Term of very large Signification, and comprehends many Things under it, and what and how many, is not here express'd. Before *Timothy*, who had been instructed by the Apostle, knew full well

(a) 1 Ep. ch. 1. v. 5. (b) Ep. ad Smyrn.

what Objects it comprehended, and so were Matters or Articles of Faith. But this is not so clear to us now, for want of an especial Account of the several Particulars, which gave in to this general Idea of Faith, and constituted this Form; and the Consequence of this hath been, much Wrangling and Disputes in all Ages, as to what are, and are not, to be admitted into it. With which it is not my purpose at present to meddle, (a fitter Occasion perhaps of that, presenting itself hereafter) but rather to pursue the Point under the General Notion that the Apostle hath here proposed it, and shew, that there is such a thing as a *Form of Sound Words*, certain Propositions or Articles of Faith, which all Christians are bound to believe, in order to Eternal Life. And this will shew, we hope, the Necessity and Usefulness of Creeds in general, in opposition to the loud (a) Clamours, and sharp Invectives which some Men have made against them, as the most unreasonable and heaviest Impositions in the World. The Consideration of a few Things, will, with all Wise and Good Christians, we hope, sufficiently establish and recommend the use of Creeds; and especially if we can make it appear,

1. That the Scripture itself giveth good Countenance to what we term Creeds; and that not only in the Text, but at several other Places. What else can that Sacred *Depositum* signify, that the Apostle St. Paul so earnestly conjureth *Timothy* to preserve and transmit to Posterity so Inviolably? He had been taught it (b) *among many Witnesses*, and the same he was to commit to other Faithful Men, who were able to teach others also. Is it likely here, that this of which the Apostle speaketh, in which *Timothy* had been taught after so publick a manner, were exactly all the Doctrines and Truths, that are now to be found in his Writings? Must *Timothy* and his immediate Successors, learn all his Epistles by Heart? Or rather doth not common Sense instruct us, that it was some short Epitome or Summary of his Doctrine, in which all the necessary essen-

(a) *Historical Essay touching General Councils, Creeds, &c.* p. 368.

(b) 2 Tim. 2. 2.

tial Parts of Christianity were included, and so could be retained by *Timothy* and others, and prove to them a (a) *Rule of Faith*, (as he expresses it) an Example and Rule in their Preaching and Instructions? For certain somewhat this was, that *Timothy* could not depart from, that was to be preserved Whole and Entire, which could not be maintained, without defacing Christianity. In a Word, it was something, the Knowledge and belief of which, was necessary to Christians in all Ages; and whether this does not bespeak somewhat especial and Fundamental, somewhat like a Creed, may be referred to the unbyassed Judgment of every Man.

But farther, that this same Apostle inculcated Christianity very much according to those General Heads or Points of Belief, which now we call Articles of Faith, clearly appeareth from other Places. As when the *Corinthians* had been misled into gross Errors, by false Teachers, he thus Addresses them; (b) *For I delivered, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our Sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third Day, according to the Scriptures.* This was doubtless, part of that Form which he delivered to *Timothy*; and that he goes not on farther in the enumeration of other Heads or Articles of Belief, was probably, because no more was needful to his purpose there, which was to establish the *Resurrection of the Dead*, the Point the False Teacher among the *Corinthians* had opposed. But this gives us a Specimen of what the Apostle taught, and approacheth pretty near, I think, the Form of Creeds. And upon the whole, although I will not pertinaciously contend, that such a number of Propositions, which makes now a Creed, can be proved from Scripture, to have been the Subject of the Apostle's Preaching, and required to be believed by all Christians, yet thus much is certain from their Writings, That upon some Propositions they laid great stress, and exacted the belief of them so strictly, that without it, Men could not be deem'd Christians, which is not much different from imposing a Creed.

(a) *Rom. 6. v. 17.* (b) *1 Cor. ch. 15. v. 4, 5.*

2dly. The Authority and Usefulness of Creeds, will appear further from the constant Mention that is made of them, in the most Early and Learned Fathers of the Christian Church. As far as we have any Records, we have clear and plain Indications of Creeds. When St. Ignatius opposeth Genuin Christianity to the Errors of Hereticks, he conceiveth and delivereth it under distinct Heads or Propositions, like Articles of Faith. (a) *So, saith he, say your Ears, when any Man Preacheth to you, without Regard to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ of the Seed of David, Born of Mary, who was truly Born, and was truly Persecuted under Pontius Pilate, and at last Crucified: Who rose again from the Dead, the Father raising him as a Type and Earnest of our Resurrection, who believe in him.* This was spoken in Regard to a particular View, to confute the Heresy of those, who denied the real Incarnation and Sufferings of Jesus Christ; and Represented him only as a mere Ghost or Apparition; and the strength of this Arguing lies in this, that it contradicted those several Heads, or Principal Points of the Christian Revelation, that he here enumerates. From whence to me it is clear, that the Old Christians judg'd and determin'd of Error and Heresy, as it expressly, or in consequence contradicted, or deviated from these General Heads, that we term Articles of Faith. For, to what Purpose else should be rang'd together so many Propositions, according to the very Form of our Creeds, but to shew in what the Christian Faith principally consisted, and the Rule whereby they judg'd of other Doctrines, which must evince, I think, that they both conceived and represented Christianity, under distinct Heads or Articles of Faith.

If we trace farther down into the Writings of the early Christians, we shall find, not only Mention made of Creeds, but Creeds themselves. In the Works of that early Father (b) *Irenæus*, is a Creed, both as to Matter and Form, or order of Propositions, very little different from what we call the

(a) Ignat. Epist. ad Tralle. (b) Irenæ. p. 206. Ed. Grabe.

Apostles Creed. Which was not the Belief, he says of one Church, but of all the Churches, which the Apostles Planted. They all agreed in those Points, which made up the Creed, howsoever they differ'd in other Matters. (a) In the Works of *Tertullian*, there is likewise a Creed, very little different from this of the foregoing Fathers, which was the Faith he says too of all the Apostolical Churches. And from this general Agreement of Creeds in the Ancient Churches, I think one of these two Things must be granted, either that the Apostles left certain Articles of Faith Expressly in Creeds, or else their Discourses and Writings contain'd them so openly and clearly, that upon Men's considering, what they themselves believed, or what was proper to teach others, some Propositions easily distinguished themselves from others of a less Momentous Nature, and so naturally resolv'd themselves into Articles of Faith or Creeds. Which leads me to the Third Consideration, which will help to destroy this Prejudice as to Creeds.

And that is, it casts the greatest Blemish upon Christianity itself, or the Apostles Writings, as it represents them under a Character, that no body can understand the true Scope and Design of them. If we consider, that in all Arts and Sciences, there are some Principal Essential Parts; without a Comprehension of which, no Man can be said to understand, much less be able to teach those Sciences, in any competent Degree to others. And that Men who do thoroughly understand any Science, do most certainly discern and distinguish the Principal and Fundamental Things in it. And if it be otherwise in Christianity; if there be nothing in it Essential, Principal, or Fundamental, certainly Christianity must be a very strange, loose incoherent Thing in itself, or else the Apostles had a strange loose way of teaching it. For Example; we will suppose a Man affirms that he understands Christianity, and that another should desire Information or Instruction in it; what could such a Man do, but what all Men do; when interrogated or examin'd concerning the Nature of any other Art or Science, that they profess to understand? That is,

(a) *Tertull. p. 36. lib. 1. adversus Hæreticos.*

I think, deliver some especial and Fundamental Parts or Doctrines contained in it, and upon which, the others depend. And this in its natural Process terminates in a Creed, or a short Summary of what is to be believed. And to suppose Christianity incapable of being thus collected and disposed into Heads, is to suppose it to be something, although no body can tell what.

4thly. Creeds seem very Useful and Necessary to preserve Christianity in its Purity and Perfection; and to debar Church Governours of them, is to deal worse with Christianity, than with any Thing in the World. For the Professors of all Arts and Sciences, as I said, are allow'd to examine and judge of the Proficiency of any Students or Pretenders to them, by Questions, which will especially try their Knowledge in them; and this hath been acknowledged a very good Method of excluding Ignorant and Unskilful Men. And why the same should not prove as good a Means of preventing Error and Ignorance in Christianity, no Reason can be assign'd, unless the foregoing; namely, that its Doctrines are so Obscurely deliver'd, or that it is a Thing of so prodigious a Latitude, that no body of the greatest Probity and Discernment can tell, what is Necessary or Fundamental in it: So that any Man of any Belief, any Persuasion whatever, may be admitted a Member of it. This is indeed a very good Argument against Creeds, but were it true, is a very bad one for Christianity, and makes it as heavy an Imposition as Creeds themselves, as it represents the Holy Scriptures, as I before hinted, a strange medly of Discourse, without any thing certain or fundamental in it. But if the Doctrine of Christianity or the *New Testament* be otherwise, (as assuredly it is) If certain Points of Faith are very clearly distinguish'd, and the Terms of Salvation fix'd and determin'd in it, why cannot they be Collected into a short Form, and Men's Belief tried in these necessary Essential Points? This was the constant Method of the Antient Church, and under this View, a very Wise and Good one it was, a great Defence of the Apostles Doctrine, what kept the Church as free as possible of Error and Heresy, which perhaps is the Thing that so engages some Men against Creeds now, they stand-

standing in the way of those laudable Ends, they have in View, of introducing Paganism or Scepticism upon us. But this is out of my way here; only one cannot but observe, that it looketh with a Face open and plain enough, that such Men can have as little Love for Christianity, as Creeds, when they would disarm it of so excellent a Means of its Preservation. And so I proceed,

To the 2^d Point; To shew whence this Form of Sound Words was derived to Timothy. *Hold fast the Form*, saith the Apostle, *which thou hast heard of me*. St. Paul was his Spiritual Father, Master, and Instructor; and in this Case he was not to pretend to exceed, or out-do him. If he kept what he had committed to him as a Trust, and transmitted it entire and uncorrupt to other Faithful Men, it was enough, in which doubtless, the Apostle would suggest his own Authority, and consequently the Authority of all the Apostles, in Matters of Faith, that an Appeal was to be made to them, and they were to be heard, and relied on, in all Controversies and Disputes, that might arise amongst Christians. And hence if all Men in the Apostles Time, were to acquiesce in their Sentiments or Decisions, make their Teaching the Rule of Faith and Practice; it will be the Duty of all Christians now, to pay the same Holy Deference and Regard to their Writings, make them the Standard and Test, whereby to try all Doctrines, because the only Means we have now of knowing what they taught, is by what their Writings contain. And as Divine Inspiration secured the Apostles from all Momentous Mistakes in their Preaching: So Divine Providence secureth us, that now we have all necessary and fundamental Points remaining pure and uncorrupt in those Writings. For it is a vain Thing to Talk of any other way of knowing what the Apostles Taught, if their Writings do not contain it, it is no where, and Christianity is long since lost in the World. If therefore Christianity be of Moment, and the intent of Divine Providence be, as long as the World lasts, that Men should have the Means of knowing it truly; the Sum of Christianity must be assuredly now contain'd in the *New Testament*. And this I take to be Demonstrative of the Truth and Authority of the present Canon of the *New Testament*.

Testament, upon supposition of a Divine Providence, and the Truth and Divinity of the Christian Revelation. But as to the Authority of the Apostles (whether in Preaching or Writing) in Opposition to all others, Three Things will confirm it.

1st. The Reason and the Nature of the Thing itself. For the Apostles were the Persons, especially chosen by our Saviour, and sent forth by him, to Propagate this Religion in the World; and it can never enter into any Man's Head, who believes the Gospel a Divine Revelation, that they did not deliver it truly and fully. For if one considers, What should hinder their delivering the Perfect and Entire Will of God, when they were Expressly sent by him on this Errand? Such a failure must arise either from Design or Weakness, according to either of which, our brightest Notions of the Divine Attributes are contradicted; for it is supposed, that the Weakness or ill Design of Men, is capable of overthrowing the Wisdom and Councils of God; and in a Matter too of great and extraordinary Importance, no less than the eternal Salvation of Mankind. Every Man therefore who believes not the Gospel a Humane Invention or Fable, but a Divine Revelation, in pure consequence of this, is bound to believe, the Apostles Infallible, at least in all Points necessary for Men to know and believe, in order to eternal Life; and that whatsoever they omit to Instruct the World in by their Writings, is of no Necessary and Important Nature to this great End, neither will ever the Knowledge or Belief thereof be exacted of Mankind.

But we are not thus Infallibly secure, that other Men cannot Err, even in Necessary and Important Matters. No! Although they are Men upon other Accounts of the highest Characters, of the most close Reasoning or sublimest Parts, or Learning, nay, if they appear Miraculously Attested and Endow'd. To the Purpose: Supposing we had seen *Simon Magus* do Miraculous Things, as Ecclesiastical Authors say he did, and withal Insinuating or openly Avouching Doctrines contrary to those of the Apostles, in such a Case he must be in the right, or the Apostles. But what Wise and Understanding Christian would

would follow him? Surely none. But if we ask ourselves Why: I suppose upon Examination, because *Simon Magus* would not have been found a Follower of our Saviour, not chosen and sent by him, to Publish those glad Tidings of Salvation to the World, and consequently our Faith towards him, would not be founded upon the Wildom, Goodness, and Veracity of God, as it is in regard to the Apostles. For the Christian Religion may be true, and yet *Simon Magus* or any other Man be a Deceiver or Impostor; but how the Christian Religion should be true, and yet the Apostles of our Lord be Prevaricators, or Deceivers, is hard to imagine. And this the Apostles Apprehended. For when they conceived it necessary to fill up the Room of *Judas*, they chose one who had always accompanied our Lord, and heard his Discourses, and seen his Miracles with themselves. For when a Religion is supposed true, who should in all Reason be presumed infallibly to Teach it, but such, whom God had Ordain'd, and sent of this Message? This being so very Evident, one would Wonder what should ail a Great and Celebrated Critick, who owns the Truth of the Christian Revelation, and yet raises great Doubts and Scruples about their Inspiration or infallible Security from Error, in the teaching or committing it to Writing. Which is as much as to say, that God had something of great Moment to reveal to Mankind, and would permit the Persons charged with this Errand, to mistake in the imparting it. This I am afraid in its Consequence, overturns the Christian Faith. For in vain shall a Man hold the Truth of the Christian Religion, and deny or suspect in that Matter, the Infallibility of the Apostles; for this Religion we have from the Apostles, and so far as a Man suspects the Apostles capable of Error, just so far shall a Man Suspect the Christian Faith of Error.

2dly. The Writings of the Apostles claim of all Christians a Submission to their Doctrines and Decisions. The Apostle *St. Paul* reckons up divers Orders in the Church, but first are placed *Apostles*. And again when others innovated under so great a Pretence as Inspiration, the Apostle is very warm in asserting his own Authority against them. *What says he, came the Word of God out from you?*

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As much as to say, Are ye Apostles? Or did the Christian Faith spring from you, that all Men must submit to your Judgments? Or came it to you only? Did no one ever hear of, or doth no one understand the Christian Religion but your selves, that you are so Peremptory in your own way? The Apostle is therefore forced to be as Peremptory in his, that all their Splendid Pretensions might give way to his Authority. *If any Man says he thinks himself a Prophet or Spiritual, let him acknowledge the Things I Write unto you, are the Commandments of the Lord.* And no Wonder, that the presence of Inspiration must give way to his Authority, when he declares the Dignity of an Angel insignificant to weaken it. *If we or an Angel Preach any other Doctrine unto you, than what ye have received, let him be Accursed.* And so again St. John, *he that is of God heareth us, he that is not of God, heareth not us.* When a Man reads such Expressions, who can doubt, whether the Apostles esteem'd themselves Infallible or not, in the Delivery of the Terms of Salvation?

3dly. This Method of Arguing the (a) Wisest and most Early Fathers of the Primitive Church took to confute Hereticks in their Time. And a most solid and convincing way of Arguing it was. Many most absurd and extravagant Conceits, were broach'd in those Days, as high Speculations in the Christian Faith. And to this replied the Fathers, these Matters are to be decided by Scripture: But then which are the genuin Scriptures, and what is the true Sense of them? (For the Hereticks own'd some Books they call'd Scriptures too) To this the Fathers in two Things demonstratively cleared these Questions. As to the first, which were the true Scriptures, and who had corrupted them; this would Evidently appear by having Recourse to the Original Writings of the Apostles, which yet were extant in the several Churches. And as to the genuin Sense of them, this would easily appear too, by consulting the Churches, the Apostles themselves had Planted. If

(a) See Irenæ. Ed. Grabe. p. 37. 57. 81. Tertull. p. 39. Irenæ. p. 101. 200.

those Churches never heard of any of those Doctrines, that the Hereticks attempted to obtrude on the Christian World; they must needs be deem'd upstart and novel Dreams. Here the Hereticks had little to reply, but that either the Apostles did Dissemble, or not fully understand their own Religion; which was such an absurdity, that no Man would desire to reduce an Adversary to a greater. I only here observe, all the Force of this arguing is resolved into the Authority of the Apostles.

And so much shall suffice for the two Points propounded, I pass on to the Application, which shall be chiefly drawn from the first of these Particulars.

The Doctrine before us is, that there is such a Thing as a *Form of sound Words*, or certain Articles of Faith, that God requireth the Belief of in Order to Eternal Life: And these Articles of Faith, or Terms of Salvation, are to be Learn'd from the Apostles, the Men whom God appointed to instruct the World in this Doctrine, and convert Men to it. This being so clear, one would suppose, that all Men, who make Profession of this Religion, should readily acquiesce in it. But upon the bare opening of our Eyes, the Practises of Men appear quite the Reverse. What innumerable Pretences have all Ages lifted up against this plain infallible way to Eternal Life, and how very hardly can the wanton Imaginations of Men, be bound-ed within this Divine Rule and Path? What will not Men hearken to rather than the Word of God? One while Creeds, and Creed Makers, in General, have afforded Matter of a World of Declamation, of Profane Wit and Reflection, and have been represented as the most Pestilent Things in the Earth. At other Times, instead of being govern'd in our Belief, by the Doctrines of the Apostles, we are taught to rely on fallible Men, and on vain and uncertain Traditions, and in direct opposition to the clear Revelations of God's Word. Others resolve all into immediate Inspiration, and the Dictates of the Holy Ghost. From another Quarter, a Perpetual Noise is heard about Free-Thinking, clear and distinct Ideas, and the force of Human Reason, as if all were to be resolved into these; as if these were to decide all, and our Faith was to be Grounded on them instead of the Sacred Scriptures. Blessed God! What variety of Conceits and Inventions
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are here, and all to oppose and defeat the Truth! And what Numbers have gone into them all! I shall select one or two of them, which seem to bear the greatest Opposition to the Doctrine in the Text, spring from Men of Celebrated Names, and with which our Times are most infected. And,

The 1st. Shall be with regard to the Prejudice some Men have entertain'd in general as to Creeds, and Creed-makers, as if all of them were gross and abominable Impositions on Mankind. Many here must needs know, what a common Place this is with the Men, who ingross to themselves the Privilege of clear Reasoning, and boast a freedom of Thought beyond other Mortals; what Railery and Invectives it yieldeth against Men of the most Venerable Names and Characters, or more properly against the Christian Religion itself. But why are all Creeds such heavy Impositions? Is there really then nothing in the word of God required to be believed? Yes a very few Things, (as I shall hint by and by). But the cause of Complaint lies not there, but Antient Fathers (as we term them) met in what are call'd general Councils, and there they made Creeds. And these Fathers were weak and fallible Men, manag'd their Disputes with that Heat and ill Temper, that these Gentlemen very civilly Honour their Assemblies with the Titles of *Cock-pits* and *Bear-Gardens*, instead of general Councils. And this I should not mention, but to raise a just Indignation in good Christians, as surely all such must be seized with, when they hear, that many of the Antient Fathers were great Sufferers, and Sealed the Truth of these Articles with their Blood. Thus are these Fathers rewarded by some of us (who call ourselves Christians) for their Zeal and good Intention at least, to deliver down the Doctrines of the Apostles to us Pure and Uncorrupt. But my Intent is not here to Vindicate the Weaknesses and Infirmities of Men, and yet we hear, that Debates in Parliament have been attended with great Heats, and notwithstanding from thence at last, have issued good and wholesome Laws. The Question here is about Creeds; and will these Men prove, that the Creeds which the Works of the Antient Fathers contain are no where found

or enjoy'd in Scripture? This is the way to undeceive the World about Creeds, and not to rake into the Ashes of the Dead, expose their Infirmities, and call them the worst Names.

(a) Mr. *Hobs* first attempted this, and strenuously contended there was but one Article of Faith required in Scripture, namely, *that Jesus is the Messiah or Son of God*. With the same Opinion took up a later Writer (b) of very great Abilities, who hath been succeeded by Disciples since of far less Parts, but much greater Malice. But Attack'd the foresaid Author was about other Articles, such as the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection of our Saviour, and the like, and sorely press'd to speak out plainly, whether these were not to be believed likewise. He granted it, but then he said this one Article included many others, and indeed as far as it appeareth, the Sum of the Apostles Creed. So that we may observe this was in itself a very fruitful Article; and if upon being tried and examined, it yielded the Apostles Creed, who can say, but upon its being further examin'd and press'd, it might not have yielded the Substance of the *Nicene*, and what is termed *Athanasian* likewise? For it may be very reasonably presumed, that this acute and close Reasoner, as little thought at first, that in this one Article was contain'd the Apostles Creed, as those others, which are but larger Explications of it; and if what we term the Apostles Creed, proves but a larger Explication of this one Article of Faith, peradventure the *Nicene* and *Athanasian* may prove at last too, but larger Explications of the Apostles, and so this one Article, when perfectly unfolded and resolved into all its several Parts, may virtually contain them all. (c) But that which I intend to remark is this, that only with this Salvo could this great Author maintain his Ground, by yielding the train of Articles, that this one implied or inferred after it, which all understanding Men will Judge, I believe, but a poor shift, a very poor Discovery, which

(a) *De civitate Christi*. p. 286. (b) *Reasonableness of Christianity*, &c. (c) *Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, &c. p. 130. 137. 139. &c.

Evidently fell short of its Pretensions, and left the Belief of all Christians, much as it was before.

And that this was the Case is further Evident. For when this Gentleman was asked what he thought of the Doctrines contained in the Epistles, as well as Gospels, whether the Apostles were not as infallible, and as much to be believed in the one, as the other, he yielded this too, every good Christian was bound to believe all the Apostles Wrote. You will then say, wherein lay the Discovery? Here if any where. The belief of this one Article, *that Jesus was the Messiah, made a Man a Christian*; but then if he did not believe afterwards, all the Explanations, the Apostles made of this one Article, and other Parts of the Christian Faith, he straight became no Christian. So that he enjoyed this Privilege but a very little while, and seems admitted into the Church, only in order to be turned out of it again. For although the belief of this one Article made a Man a Christian; the disbelief of the rest as certainly Unchurch'd and unchristian'd him again, when he came to understand more was reveal'd. This was the Result of that Dispute according to the best of my Understanding, which sure was no great Matter,

2dly. This Doctrine in the Text, sets Bounds to what Men call *Free-Thinking*. For it is very plain here, that Timothy and all Men that would be Christians, were to think and believe conformably to the Apostles Doctrine, had no Liberty to alter, to Contradict, much less Expose the main Articles, that they Preached and Inculcated the Belief of upon the whole World. Men may do this indeed, (for what may not Men do?) but then it is very Evident, they are no Christians, and they must not take it as Reflection and Slander, that they are Represented under such a Character. It is true indeed, Men have a Liberty to entertain any Conceits; Men may be *Deists* or *Atheists*, or what they please; for the Christian Religion offers no Force; but then such a Liberty will Evidently destroy all Pretensions to Christianity; which most certainly confines Men in their Opinions and Belief; and if Men cannot undergo such a Confinement, it is a very clear Case, that they cannot *persuade themselves to be Christians*.

And

And a great deal fairer would it be ; and much less hurt would it do, if Men thus openly shew'd themselves, and Professedly, like the Old Heathens, opposed the Christian Revelation : Then the Scope and Drift of those Men, would be easily understood by all, and Wise Men would judge of the Force of *this Free-Thinking* by the Arguments it produceth against Christianity : Whereas now Men are prejudic'd against their own Religion, made Atheists or Infidels, by sly and false Insinuations, without Proofs or Arguments.

In a late Book, a *Discourse on Free-Thinking* ; every loose Opinion, that Men in all Ages have uttered against Natural or Revealed Religion, every Sentence in Books, that can be perverted or disguised to a Profane and Irreligious Meaning, all this is called *Free-Thinking*, and intitles the Authors of them to this Glorious Character, and a great deal of this kind of stuff, is rak'd together ; but every Man, who has spoken in Favour of his Religion, or shewn any Concern or Zeal for it, is not only traduced as entirely destitute of any Capacity of *Thinking*, but of all Moral Virtue and Honesty. And under this Head are rang'd the best and wisest Men, both of the Antient and Present Times. All are Miserably Weak, or Knavish Men ; and why ? Because they cannot Sacrifice their Bibles and Consciences, and give up the People committed to their Charge, to what these Men call *Free-Thinking*, with whom, every loose Opinion or Conceit, altho' never so absurd and indefensible is *Free Thinking* : (a) Nay with which King Solomon himself and other Prophets (as this Author tells us) abound and have uttered Glorious Strains of. In which these Holy Pen-men fare no better we see, than our Divines, which ought to keep them in Countenance under the Charge of Contradiction and Atheistical Positions. So that in fine, the aim of this *Free-Thinking* amounts in other Words to nothing else, but a craving leave to vilify and utter Scandal, to expose the Christian and all Religion, and make as many Infidels as possible without Arguments or Proof ; which is a Liberty

(a) King Solomon is represented as an Atheist, p. 150.

that looks somewhat extraordinary; I confess, and whether for the good of the Nation to grant, others are the best Judges. In the mean time, in the midst of all this, in the midst of the greatest looseness both of Manners and Opinions (the one thus supporting and encouraging the other) to what a pass is Religion growing in these Nations? This, all who sincerely believe the Christian Religion, cannot but See, Deplore, and Lament. And to such I would here Address my self, and excite their Caution, that they be not infected with such Notions, exchange not the *New Testament* and their dependance on that, for I know not what wild and extravagant Conceits. Learn not Atheism, Deism, under the plausible Pretence of *Free-Thinking*. We have the Misfortune in this Nation exceedingly to divide in Opinion, and many Enemies hath the Established Church, and *Priest* is become a term of the greatest Reproach, and any thing is Read, Extoll'd, and greedily Swallow'd down, that abounds with Slander and Ridicule of our Order, and Aims to make it contemptible to the People. Whatever Men's Religion be (if they have any at all) altho' I differ from them, I may presume thus far to advise them, not to permit Party and their Rage against *Priests*, and the Sweet Entertainment that such Authors give them, I say not to permit these things to insinuate a Contempt of all things Sacred, and make them as great Defyers of God and Religion, as they are of the *Priests*. For these things are nearly linked together, are strangely mixed together in some Writings, and without great Care, may easily be imbibed together. As for ourselves we are little in pain, such Treatment (while we do not deserve it) is neither any Discouragement or Dishonour to us, neither shall we be in Danger of receiving the less Esteem from good Men, because we are the Mark of Evil Men's Hatred and Slander; rather it is an Argument, I hope, of the Truth of our Religion and Church, that its Teachers are thus singled out, and levell'd at, Prosecuted with such Spite, by the Instruments and Agents of the Kingdom of Darkeness. It is plain, we are a great Eye-sore and Grievance to these Men, stand greatly in their way, and I hope by the Assistance of God ever shall, as it is our Glory so to do.

To conclude. With more Safety sure can we rely upon the Authority of Jesus Christ, than upon any Productions of Humane Wit : And if any sort of *Free-Thinking* tends to withdraw our Reverence for the Bible, makes us *Infidels* and *Atheists*, let us decline and abhor it. For to lose our Religion in order to be *Free-Thinkers*, we have all the Reason in the World to fear, will prove but a bad Exchange. Even Quakers who are herein courted and gratified, should in my Opinion esteem this, the worst Sect that hath appeared. For the same Men, they may be assured, that can thus impiously traduce Fathers, Divines, Teachers of all Religions, yea Prophets and Inspired Men, can find Matter against them too, whensoever they shall think them an Object worthy of their Malice or Ridicule.

But whatsoever other Men do, let us mind the Apostle in these Injunctions. *This Charge I commit unto thee Son Timothy ; that thou mightest War a good Warfare, holding Faith and a good Conscience, which some having put away concerning Faith have Erred. And again, take heed to thy self and to thy Doctrine, and continue in them ; and in doing this, thou shalt save thy self, and them that hear thee. O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy Trust ; avoiding Profane and Vain Babblings, and Oppositions of Science, falsely so called ; which some professing, have erred concerning the Faith. And contend earnestly for the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints. Who can read such Expressions of the New Testament, without apprehending a necessity of submitting to the Apostles Doctrines, and to be careful of our Belief as well as Practice ? God forbid, we should mistake Luke-warmness and Indifferency in Religion for the Virtue of Moderation. This is certainly the way to lose the Christian Faith. For how do Men think they can lose it ? It cannot ordinarily be taken from them by Force, as outward Things may, but they rather ought to fear Looseness of Principles insinuated by cunning Craftiness whereby Men lie in wait to deceive. Thus it hath been lost in Countries where it is now entirely extinguished. Let others Example be a warning to us, and teach us that we exchange not at last Christianity for Heathenism, relapse into this or Infidelity,*
and

and by our eager Disputes, help on the Designs of
Men, who visibly aim not to uphold this or that Religion,
but to Destroy all.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and
God the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and
Glory, Might, Majesty and Dominion
ascribed, both now and for ever
more.

F I N I S

ERRATA.

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